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ABSTRACT

This paper on trends in special education and implications for training personnel emphasizes the importance of partnerships between elementary and secondary schools and colleges of education, and specifically recommends the establishment and implementation of clinical models of teacher education and the formation of Professional Development Centers. Professional Development Centers serve as model sites for supervised clinical experiences and facilitate the transition of theory and research into practice. Staff members of Professional Development Centers must be committed to collaborative efforts in clinical preparation, applied research, and continuing professional development of all parties. The Centers should be located in a variety of socioeconomic settings and should reflect a state's population characteristics. The Center concept requires that curricula and instructional strategies be designed to model research-based practices and learning models discussed in universities' teacher preparation programs. This paper discusses qualities of clinical supervisors in Professional Development Centers, program characteristics, obstacles and inhibitors to obtaining the ideal program, and stages in moving toward this ideal. (JDD)

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Professional Development Centers: A Collaborative Model

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Defining the Issue

Educational reform has increasingly focused on improving the professional status and the professional learning and development of teachers. Although the focus on regulation and accountability that was revived in the early 1980's has not dissipated, recent analysis and recommendations for reform have emphasized the development of the teaching profession as the most feasible approach for upgrading the quality of classroom practice and learning opportunities for students (e.g., Maeroff, 1988; Meatens & Yarger, 1988).

A number of reports (Holmes Group (1986), Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986) and Governors' 1991 Report on Education (1986) have been very critical of schools and how teachers are selected, educated and licensed. Each of these reports emphasize the importance of recruiting and selecting high caliber students to major in education.

The Holmes Group, Carnegie Forum and Governors's Report have provided an impetus for new initiatives which expand teachers' roles in their own professional learning and development, in developing curriculum and instructional programs, and in improving the conditions of their schools as places to work and learn. They have also provided direction for the improvement of preservice teacher education and the learning opportunities available to beginning and experienced teachers.

These reports emphasize the importance of the linkage of schools and school districts to other institutions and the development of partnerships around issues of common interest and concern. One of the most potentially powerful of these collaborative efforts are partnerships between schools and colleges of education. Specifically, these reports have recommended the establishment and implementation of clinical models of teacher education and the formation of Professional Development Centers.

These recommended partnerships may have an immediate impact on the preparation of teacher educators. Thus, individuals being prepared for leadership roles in higher education will need to understand the concept of Professional Development Centers and their specific function in the preservice training of classroom teachers.

Teacher educators must be competent in skills needed to work collaboratively in a school environment with college students, classroom teachers, administrators and children. They will also

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need a broader understanding of the total curriculum and how it impacts on students with learning problems. Educational leaders must also be educated as teacher educators who truly understand the competencies required by a classroom teacher to become reflective and analytical in their selection of instructional strategies, methods and materials.

Alternative Solution

Many universities are experimenting with the establishment of Professional Development Centers in a response to the national challenge to improve the quality of teacher preparation programs. Professional Development Centers serve as model sites for supervised clinical experiences and facilitate the transition of theory and research into practice. The centers provide an environment where the most up-to-date research-based instructional practices and programs can be observed and experienced by those preparing to be teachers and/or administrators.

These clinical experiences should be sequenced, analytical, rigorous, and take place in different settings and with a variety of learners. These centers also provide an environment where teachers can use principles and theories to analyze, hypothesize, and improve instructional and learning conditions. Professional preparation embodies broad cultural knowledge, specialized knowledge and guided practice.

Professional preparation programs must emphasize analytical experiences in order for practitioners to be able to combine various bodies of knowledge into strategies for meeting changing or unique circumstances. Such programs also emphasize educators learning to know why things are as they are and for satisfying the passion to know more in order to improve existing conditions.

A major component of any teacher preparation program should be the formation of Professional Development Centers. Expanded collaborative relationships with colleagues in selected schools are a necessity to achieve this goal. Staff members of Professional Development Centers must be committed to collaborative efforts in clinical preparation, applied research, and continuing professional development of all parties. Preparation must present a carefully sequenced series of clinical experiences. Each clinical aspect must integrate pre-professional and professional components into a rigorous experience where formal knowledge is used as a guide to practical action. Clinical components must be analytical, with an opportunity for students' inductive learning. Clinical experiences should include an opportunity for observation and experimentation. They should also include contact with a wide variety of students at differing age levels, and with varying learning abilities. The Professional Development Centers should be located in a variety of socioeconomic settings and reflect a state's population characteristics.

The teachers and administrators in the Professional Development Centers and those faculty members from the school of education working with a district need to work collaboratively to develop programs and instructional strategies. The Professional Development Center concept requires that curricula and instructional strategies be designed to model research-based practices and learning models discussed in university's teacher preparation programs. Professional Development Center teachers and administrators and university faculty must work together to create a learning environment which accommodates both teacher education theory and practice.

Professional Development Center faculty should be teachers who are jointly selected by a university and school district personnel to be clinical supervisors and/or instructors. These faculty should have the ability to supervise students in clinical experiences, and internships, and to teach "practice based" classes. They should be joined by university faculty members in collaborative efforts to model effective classroom practices, to teach education majors the research-based practices that impact on student achievement, and to supervise clinical experiences.

Selected members of Professional Development Centers should be given the title of clinical supervisor or clinical assistant professor. The following guidelines should be used in selecting teachers for this new role:

1. Selected individuals must be outstanding (mentors) teachers.

2. Selected individuals must receive appropriate training for their role.

3. Individuals should be able to supervise field experiences, teach selected college courses in the professional sequence, and evaluate students in areas where they have the appropriate expertise and approval from a university.

4. Individuals should be involved in the development and evaluation of teacher education programs.

5. Some clinical professors may be jointly employed by a university and school district.

A program designed to meet these goals should:

1. Be developmental and sequential. A number of different clinical experiences is essential in preparing professional educators. These experiences should be developmental in scope, sequential in nature, and provide an individual with a variety of learning opportunities.

2. Include various stages of a clinical experience which has purpose for students as well as the faculties of the cooperating school and the school of education. Professional Developmental Centers provide an environment for school-based action research to take place. This research should meet the interest and needs of school children, college students, and faculties of the cooperating schools, and the school of education. Focus should be on analysis of students' individual needs.

3. Include collaborative efforts which are clearly articulated and flexible. Thus, constant planning and evaluation is critical if the collaborative Professional Development Centers are to be successful.

4. Include clinical experiences which are knowledge-based and reflect the best research information currently available to students, teachers, and faculty.

5. Include clinical experiences which reflect the social, political, psychological and organizational setting within an ethical and moral framework.

Obstacles, Barriers and Inhibitors to Obtaining the Ideal

The establishment of Professional Development Centers requires extensive planning between university faculty members, school district staff, administrators and local boards of education. There are several concerns regarding the planning and implementation of a Professional Development Center.

1. School districts may be overwhelmed by the Professional Development Center concept and concerned with the impact on their staff and students.

2. Planning and implementation of a Professional Development Center requires a collaborative effort, a process which may be difficult to achieve.

3. Appropriate funds and time must be made available to a Professional Development Center staff.

4. University reward systems for tenure and promotion may limit faculty commitment to Professional Development Centers.

5. Unions and their established work rules may inhibit implementation of a Professional Development Center.

6. Selection of classroom teachers who are competent to make significant contributions to the Professional Development Center concept may be difficult.

7. Selection of university faculty who are competent to make constructive contributions to the Professional Development Concept may be difficult.

8. Identification of university faculty members who are willing to become part of a professional team teach and spend extensive time in a school may limit implementation of Professional Development Center.

Many of these obstacles can be minimized or eliminated with careful planning and cooperation. This process will initially require a series of small group meetings to develop the concept of a Professional Development Center and its purpose.

These small group meetings should subsequently be expanded to include larger numbers of individuals from a university and school district, including school board members and parents. All participants should have an opportunity to react and make recommendations.

Ultimately, a partnership agreement should be developed between a university and school district. The agreement should spell out the specific roles of the university and school district, as well as the length of the partnership. This agreement should be accepted by both parties.

Strategies for Moving Toward the Ideal

To accomplish these goals, the following stages are suggested:

Stage One - Collaborative Planning: Professional Developmental Center staff and the university faculty should meet to:

1. Establish the procedures and guidelines for collaboration.

2. Agree on the goals of clinical preparation and identify and define the range of possibilities.

3. Define roles of all members of the Collaborative Professional Development Centers.

4. Establish the sequence of effective clinical opportunities.

5. Begin pilot operations in selected schools during an academic year.

Stage Two - Implementation: The program planned in Stage One should be implemented in one school at a time. The following procedures should be considered when implementing the Collaborative Professional Development Centers:

Clinical Experiences: The clinical experience should represent the preservice teacher's first structured experience in a public school. This experience should emphasize active participation in a classroom combined with the opportunity to analyze and reflect on that experience both in seminars and in one-on-one conferences. These experiences should be integrated and required of all preservice majors.

Extended Clinical Experiences: The second clinical experience should expand on those activities from the first year through increased exposure to the teacher/learning process with students possessing a wide variety of abilities. Clinical experience during the early stages of this segment of the program should provide students with an opportunity to teach small groups and full classes related to their area of specialization. This clinical experience should place increased emphasis on decision-making with the opportunity to analyze and reflect on that experience both in seminars and one-on-one conferences.

Intensive Clinical Experience: During the third clinical experience preservice teachers might teach children of different cultural backgrounds and/or with learning problems. Emphasis would be on the role of the teacher as a decision-maker and leader. Demonstrating the ability to plan, teach, evaluate and self-evaluate would be essential components of a successful clinical experience.

Continued Professional Development: The above three clinical experiences are related to preservice preparation. Inherent in these activities is the expectation that preservice teachers, university faculty and teachers will engage in continuous personal and professional development. In addition, all school and university faculty should participate in development activities of a Professional Development Center.

Stage Three - Evaluation and Revision: Data and related information must be collected, analyzed, and used to make program modifications.

Conclusion

It is anticipated that a preservice student who completes the proposed sequence of clinical experiences in a Professional Development Center would be a professional educator who is a decision-maker in the areas of planning, presentation, and assessment. Professional Development Center Schools could become "model schools" where teachers and administrators come to observe the newest program and approaches to teaching and learning. These schools could provide rural, urban and suburban districts with much needed opportunities to review the newest and most effective educational practices. These schools would also be

excellent sites for testing new programs and practices and for conducting research needed to respond to problems facing today's educators.

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